

AN ELEPHANT TRAGEDY.

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One Sunday afternoon some months ago a Forest Guard, stationed in the Aberdares a few miles above Nyeri, came to my house to tell me he had found some ivory in the forest. There was nothing very remarkable in that, but when I went outside to have a look at his find I saw to my astonishment no less than twelve elephant tusks, all laid out in a row, obviously quite recently extracted from their original owners.

This was the Forest Guard's story: While walking along a game track with his spearman somewhere near the Gura River, he noticed a number of vultures and footmarks of hyaena, all treading in one direction. Following these up he eventually came to the foot of a steep cliff which the elephant had apparently tumbled down, and there at the bottom of the cliff were six dead elephant.

It was some weeks before I got an opportunity of visiting the place, but when I did get to the scene of the tragedy I saw a sight to be remembered. About a mile upstream from the upper fishing camp on the Gura River the sides of the valley became almost precipitous, and on rounding a bend in the river, on the left bank, I came upon a broad scar about 200 feet long down the steep valley side. All vegetation that had managed to find a foothold had been torn up and swept away, leaving just the bare earth and projecting rocks. At the bottom of the avalanche under a mass of rocks and torn-up tree growth were the carcasses of three elephant, lying a few yards apart. A fourth lay about a hundred yards away, and about a quarter of a mile farther on, in different directions, were the carcasses of two more.

After some difficulty a Forest Guard and I managed to find a way up the bank. The first few yards of the elephant's fall were absolutely precipitous and we had to find a way round. The rest of the way up was very steep and most unpleasant going, as loose rocks and small avalanches of earth kept on tumbling down, and there was very little foot or hand hold. Eventually we came to a game track running along a contour from where the elephant had begun their fatal descent. As far as we could see there were no signs of any fighting or disturbance on the track, and though the spoor was some weeks old by then, it did not look as if two herds coming in opposite directions had met. It was evident that the track had not given way at that point as there it was perfectly intact. The only conclusion we could come to was that for some reason or other the elephant had walked down feeding off the track, the earth had immediately given way, they had been unable to recover themselves, and the whole lot

shot to the bottom. Possibly something may have scared them Wanderobo or lion.

Down in the valley the tale was quite plain. Four of the elephant had been killed almost outright, while two had managed to stagger about a quarter of a mile before succumbing to their injuries. But one of the most remarkable things of the whole affair was that in spite of the fall and the number of rocks the elephant must have hit up against, not a single tusk was even chipped.

They were all young bulls with very small tusks, in fact the smallest tusk weighed a pound and a half. However, the Forest Guard who claimed the find got a very nice little reward from the District Commissioner.